

St. Barnabas Church Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Life is changing. Isaiah 43:1-3

Change of year, change of preacher, change of beard, change of glasses and change of service start time.

Time waits for no one.

Although time might be a great healer, it's a lousy beautician.

However, the time that remains constant is that of a lady when she says, "I'll be ready in five minutes."

That is also true of the man who says, "I'll be home in five minutes."

In 1992, Queen Elizabeth II said in her Christmas Day speech to the nation that the year had been "Annus Horribilis".

I can say the same about 2024 during which I faced all sorts of difficult issues from health to family matters and yet God carried me through all the adversities.

I do not know how unbelievers cope when problems arise since they cannot turn to God and rely on Him for companionship, comfort and assurance that outcome of the present and the future is not to be feared.

By putting our trust in God, we find absolute, peace-giving security that nothing can chase away.

I will be preaching this morning on Isaiah's words reporting from the mouth of God, *But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.* Isaiah 43:1-3

The background was the Babylonian exile when God's people were carried away from their homeland and their Temple was destroyed.

Thereafter, they languished for more than a full generation as strangers in a strange land.

We can't understand the importance, the depth and the passion of the commitment God is proclaiming here without understanding the devastation that precedes it.

"I am with you", God says. "I was with you, I am with you, I will be with you."

Sadly, many Christians live victim to a blind understanding of God believing that God only deals in the world of spiritual matters like guilt, forgiveness, and heaven.

They entirely forget God made the earth and everything in it.

Their misunderstanding is so great that they feel threatened when troubles come their way—as if He doesn't know about them or is unable to assist them, but God's point for us in these three verses is: "Do not fear!"

The verses themselves provide solid reasons why we need not fear and the statement "Do not fear" is recorded in the Bible over fifty times, precisely because we fear many things.

We are vulnerable, weak, ignorant, very limited and like to think more highly of ourselves, but the facts are indisputable: people fight, quibble, worry, and fret.

However, the Lord's words here in Isaiah 43:1, encourage us and share why we, as His people, never need to fear and yet, we are susceptible to Satan's attacks that get us to doubt and worry.

God provides all the security we need but when we take our eyes off the Lord, we become alarmed, forgetting that He is our security.  
Our circumstances may change but God is constant and unchanging in His love for us and His promises never fail.

Life continues to change.

When I went for a medical check-up recently, I found that my height had shrunk by one inch which is an inch I could not afford to lose!

I thought I had been suffering from arthritis but now I believe it is the onset of rigor mortis!

My mind is sound except that, at times, I feel like a lighthouse in a desert – absolutely brilliant but totally useless.

The problem we all face is that we cannot stop the aging process, so I have resolved to make the best of each day while I have my health and enjoy my family in the process.

Furthermore, every day I want to find and experience lasting joy and laughter.

Lasting joy is neither fleeting nor fragile; a joy that can hold up even in the midst of life's problems..

Sin will always ultimately disappoint but it can bring happiness for a moment, or a day, or a week.

Sin never leads to joy, nor does it lead to freedom.

Sin leads to slavery, although it can satisfy for the moment.

Sin can lead to pleasure for a period of time, but lasting joy, lasting happiness, is the by-product of a life rightly lived.

Laughter is relationship and if there is no laughter in the home, don't expect the children to return on a frequent basis when they are adults.

Laughter is also a medicine, and there are some nationalities that are really funny in what they say without aiming to be e.g. we Irish make statements complete with added words of explanation to be sure, to be sure.

Years ago, a lady was experiencing major issues and said to Vivien and myself that we were richly blessed as we didn't face difficult problems that life threw up; but she was wrong.

At that time we were struggling with Vivien's mother who was suffering mental problems which caused the family to criticise us for a perceived lack of concern and responsibility.

It was a very difficult time during which we felt God carrying us but what that lady saw in us outwardly was a quiet heavenly peace but without being aware of the issues which we were facing on a daily basis.

Years later, the critical nature of the family was resolved and relationships restored but we continued to face many other problems - we are not exempt, no one is! Even today, we have a son who is going through a divorce and our hearts are breaking for him but thankfully we have a solid rock in the One who loves and sustains us in all adversity.

Many individuals live in and out of fears and worries, depending upon their circumstances.

This is worldly living - living as if God is not present.

Jesus admonished us not to worry but this does not mean that we will be exempt from difficult and troubling situations.

He does not promise the absence of trouble but peace to face them.

Our security is in the Lord who has promised to be with us.

Instead of trying to preserve a tame world around us, getting alarmed with each upset, it behoves us to know God's excellent promises and marvellous ways more deeply.

He is encouraging in Isaiah 43:1-3, "Get to know me" which is sound advice but contradicts our secular world which tells us to believe in ourselves - as if that will help!

The verses describe:

- God and His relationship to us, His people (verses 1 & 3)
- God's luscious promises which will strip away all the fears from our lives (verse 2)

Life is constantly changing, some of it unwanted, but it's not just life that changes. God said, toward the end of time, the world will go through very tumultuous times. We are part of a more significant change initiated by God, engulfing all other changes.

*"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth..."* (Isaiah 65:17).

When the Lord mentions that He is creating new heavens and a new earth, it establishes the present heaven and earth on a path of decay, just as He did when He established a new covenant recorded in Hebrews 8:13, *"In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."*

The apostle John adamantly states, *"The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever"* (1 John 2:17).

Similar to the birth of a child, the birth pangs of the new heavens and earth will be great as described in the Book of Revelation

The world is changing with ancient prophecies starting to be fulfilled:

- Mocking of Biblical prophecy and the Lord's return – 2 Peter 3
- Increase of wickedness – Genesis 6:5, Luke 17:26-29
- Increase of lawlessness – 2 Thessalonians 5:3
- Sudden destruction of Damascus, Syria – Isaiah 17:1, Jeremiah 43:23-27
- Allied invasion of Israel led by Russia, Iran and Turkey – Ezekiel 38-39
- Massive earthquakes increasing in frequency and intensity: 41 earthquakes have hit the UK in the past 50 days and, since the start of 2025, five have been detected across the country — Matthew 24: 4-8, Luke 21:10-11
- Global cry for peace and security – 1 Thessalonians 5:3
- Intoxicating obsession with dividing Jerusalem – Zechariah 12:1-3
- Confirming of a seven year peace agreement with many – Daniel 9:27
- Forming of a one world religion, government and economy – Revelation 17, 18, 13;11-18.

I cannot ignore or deny the collective nature of all these prophecies which reflect Bible prophecy Can you?

They are frightening but when we have placed our confidence in the Lord, we need not fear because He cares for us.

He has our future secure in the palms of His hands.

Millennialism, a thousand years, is a belief that a messianic age will be established on earth before the last judgement and the future permanent state of eternity.

At Capernwray Bible College each year we would have a morning session of lectures on Christian eschatology – end times theology.

The lecturer would describe the various doctrinal views and theories.

Afterwards the students would ask me if I was Postmillennialist or Amillennialist. Postmillennialism is the belief that Christ's coming will be post-millennial, that is, it will follow this millennium.

Amillennialism is the belief that Christ's coming will be without a millennium i.e. no world-wide era of peace and justice at the end of history.

Where do you stand?

What is your view? Do you have one?

I told the students truthfully that I didn't know and neither was I concerned but this I did know: I have been born again, I am a child of the Living God, I have a Heavenly Father who loves me, I have the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ dwelling within me and my future is secured.

Yesterday is past, tomorrow is a mystery but today is the day that the Lord has made, I will live and rejoice in it.

Today is a present which has been gifted to me in which I trust I will honour God in my thoughts, words, emotions and actions.

Can you agree with this statement?

Titus 2:11-13:

*"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

Only the Father knows the date when Jesus will appear the second time so let's not be consumed by the future.

Rather let our lives today worthy of the privilege as being a child of God with joy, laughter and that quiet assurance that our future is in God's hands irrespective of any problems we will face.

*"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."* . Isaiah 43:1-3

Life is changing.

*"You are precious in my eyes, and honoured, and I love you,"*  
Isaiah 43:4

Life will continue to change.

*"Fear not, for I am with you."* Isaiah 43:5

Bible readings:

Isaiah 43:1–7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14–17; Luke 3:15–17, 21–22